On Being Where You Are

As St. Patrick's day approaches, and thoughts turn to Ireland (or at least some fabled Emerald Isle that bears the name) I think there is something in the saint's story worth considering when we reflect on our local church:

1) There are many beautiful churches and cathedrals in Ireland.

2) Many modern (built in the 70's or later) churches in America seem uninspired, even ugly.

I'm not really qualified to make objective statements about architecture; I realize that. I'm going to have to make a point from those two very widely held yet anecdotal bits of evidence.

As a Catholic that grew up in one of those older churches that was constructed almost as a scale model of an Irish cathedral, the trend in the last 100 years of architecture is apparent to me, especially as we moved westward to where parish churches were constructed 50 years ago instead of 150 years ago.

There are some that fault the building for the lack of reverence. Some that will bemoan that the quality of music, the attire or attitudes of the other churchgoers, or yes, even the building itself does not present as good a spiritual environment as such-and-such in another place.

There are those who will even travel great distances to go to a place of worship that is, to them, more reverent, more spiritual, and more beautiful than their local parish. If at all possible, people tend to seek out that parish that resembles a cathedral – maybe even an Irish cathedral.

I am here going to mention an apparently blasphemous but painfully true statements that one must never, ever utter in such hallowed places such as Irish bars on St. Patrick's day. If you repeat this truth in such a place, you alone are responsible for the beating you suffer for it.

St. Patrick wasn't Irish. He was, to put it bluntly, a Brit.

Patrick was forcefully taken from his home and brought to the pagan isle of Ireland as a slave. He escaped, returned to Britain, and eventually returned to Ireland as a missionary and a priest. The rest is history, legend, and the story of a saint.

St. Patrick did not choose to stay near the aesthetically pleasing places of worship. He went back to the pagan land, preached, prayed, worshipped and taught in a land with no cathedrals.

Truth, Beauty, Ignorance

The things that feel spiritual or reverent to us – the music, the attire, the posture and behavior of the people, the building – these are things of man. The are aesthetics. When we make a judgement of things based on aesthetics, we're making judging as man sees, not as God sees. We're choosing things because they are attractive, or pretty.

We are called to be in the place we find ourselves, in the time we found ourselves. We may not have been kidnapped, as St. Patrick was, but nevertheless our circumstances often dictate where we are.

Maybe the way the local church worships isn't as attractive to you because of cultural differences. There are certainly legitimate ways in which worship at one church in a place and time varies from another. Some of the aesthetic preference is simply cultural or nostalgic.

But maybe the lack of perceived beauty is ignorance. Maybe people at your church aren't reverent because they don't fully understand what it is they are proclaiming, adoring, and worshipping when you gather. Truth is beauty, as Keats wrote, so the corollary that ignorance is ugly might be fitting.

If ignorance is the case, and you feel you know more than those around you, doesn't that imply you might just have a job to do there, where God has placed you?

Maybe there is something you need to learn from others in the place God has put you – after all, it was the tax collector who beat his breast in the temple that went home justified. The learned man, who was comparing himself to another in the temple even in his prayer, did not go home justified.

If St. Patrick had stayed where the faith was more firmly rooted, where people worshipped as he had when he was a boy, where they were more reverent than the pagans in Ireland, we might not have the Irish cathedrals we admire today.

Paul Nowak

Paul Nowak is a husband and father of 7, who also happens to be a writer and author. He has written *The Way of the Christian Samurai* among other books.

Share this:

Email Print X Reddit Facebook Tumblr LinkedIn

Published by Paul Nowak

Paul Nowak is a husband and father of 7, who also happens to be a writer and author. He has written *The Way of the Christian Samurai* among other books.

View all posts by Paul Nowak

March 17, 2015

Charity

Coffee Doesn't Cure Acedia

3 Prophetic Warnings From America's Founding Fathers That Have Gone Unheeded

TAKE THE DISCUSSION TO THE WIDER WEB. SHARE AND DISCUSS ELSEWHERE, OR REPLY TO THE AUTHOR DIRECTLY AT WORDSMITH -AT- ETERNALREVOLUTION.COM

Search ...

GET BLOG POSTS IN YOUR EMAIL

Get a FREE ebook copy of *The Eternal Revolution* when you sign up!

Email address:

Your email address

Sign up

READ MORE BY PAUL NOWAK

List of Books by Paul Nowak
Paul Nowak's Page on Goodreads
Paul Nowak's Page on Amazon

CONNECT WITH SOCIAL NETWORKS

Eternal Revolution on Twitter
Paul Nowak on GoodReads
Eternal Revolution on Facebook

RECENT POSTS

» Prophecy of "Guilt" – Guest Post by Caryll Houselander
» Fathers as First Warriors & Guardians – Guest Post by Myles Connolly
» Condemnation of the Epiphany Riots
» Attending JAFAX in Grand Rapids this Weekend
» Samaritan is not Synonymous with Charity

CATEGORIES

» Christian Samurai
» Christmas
» Eternal Revolution Updates
» Fields of Thought
» Heroic Virtue
  » Charity
  » Faith
  » Hope
» Uncategorized